Planning the Landscape

Management for scenic beauty and diversity can be viewed as landscaping on a grand scale. Just as you might consider the size, color, arrangement, texture, and form of plants in your home or business landscape, so should you consider these factors when surveying your woodlands.

Defining Scale

Woodlands can be viewed at two levels or scales at the same time: as a number of small micro-landscapes or as one of a few macro-landscapes. Micro-landscapes are distinct areas within a woodland; they are usually visible from a single vantage point. They can include a dense pine stand, a shady oak grove, or a hillside. Micro-landscapes break up the uniformity of the woodland. Slight differences in light, tree density, and species composition characterize the woodland and affect the way the land is viewed and appreciated.

Macro-landscapes, on the other hand, refer to primary landforms and their scale, texture, contour, shape, and space. Macro-landscapes are fixed by natural formations and by the vegetative patterns established by traditional land use. They are usually visible from many vantage points and thus should be managed carefully. Be sure to evaluate carefully the effect that topography has on your management options. In mountainous forest terrain, management activities are elevated and on display for all to see. Visual and spatial impacts must be considered during the planning process before any management activities occur. Remember, management activities that affect or alter the visual appearance of familiar landscapes must conform to the macro-landscape.

Inventory the Property

The purpose of inventorying the property is to gain a better understanding of what you own. Inventories provide information about aesthetic issues, recreational possibilities, timber, wildlife, and water quality benefits. Anyone can take a simple inventory. The experience can be a useful project and an enjoyable recreational activity.

Landowners who do not want to hire a professional will find that a systematic inventory offers an opportunity to gain a better understanding of their land and its natural resources. A good inventory will provide landowners information necessary to develop a management plan. The information that one collects during an inventory will guide future land use activities. An inventory guide and a method for measuring trees can be found in Appendices B and C.

To begin an inventory, sit down and think about what you want to know about your land. Do you want to know the number of trees per acre and the quality of those trees as timber? What about wildlife habitat? Or the number of snags per acre? Do you have deeds, surveys, or maps of your land? These are just some of the questions you need to ask when you develop a property inventory.

One of the best ways to take inventory is by using aerial photographs, which provide a bird's-eye view of land uses and vegetative cover within your boundaries and on adjacent land. Your tax department, local Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), or Farm Services Agency (FSA) offices should have aerial photographs of your land on file.

Once you obtain an aerial photo of your land, you can use a sketch or photocopy to develop a working map that can be taken into the woods for closer survey.

Preparing a Resource Map

A useful resource map might include clearings, property boundaries, prominent land and water features (e.g., ponds, creeks, ridges, or swamps), and details on current or past land uses. The map might also include roads, trails, and developed areas such as houses or recreation sites; soil types or classes; unique and sensitive areas such as waterfalls or vistas; and the location of special projects such as wildlife improvement areas, firewood reserves, or wildflower meadows.

Fitting all of this information on a single map can be difficult. Choose a workable map scale, and be selective when compiling the map. Put the most important features in plain view. To avoid clutter, you may choose to make several copies for separate resource maps, or you may want to create separate, clear acetate overlays and use transparent markers to highlight features. Overlays are especially useful because they put the total resource puzzle together